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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MOSCOW: IMPORT SAFETY WORKING GROUP

REF: A. SAXTON-CATON EMAIL (8/22)
[1](#)B. STATE 114788
[1](#)C. MOSCOW 3724
[1](#)D. MOSCOW 3039
[1](#)E. MOSCOW 1691
[1](#)F. MOSCOW 767
[1](#)G. 06 MOSCOW 12692
[1](#)H. 06 MOSCOW 12302 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On August 20, we provided information on the President's Interagency Working Group on Import Safety to a wide range of Russian government offices. Contacts at the Ministry of Health and Social Development (MOHSD) expressed general interest in participating in a future dialog on food and product safety, but asked for additional detail. They agreed to circulate Ref B points to colleagues and promised a coordinated response by the end of September. Since 2004 Embassy Moscow has been engaged in a food safety dialog with Russian counterparts, with a primary focus on protectionist policies and abuse of sanitary and phytosanitary standards, and we note that such discussion is apt to continue to be difficult. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) We provided information on the President's Interagency Working Group on Import Safety to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Economic Development and Trade (MEDT), and Health and Social Development, and the Federal Service for Consumer Protection and Human Well-Being (Rospotrebnadzor) on August 20. Representatives of the International Departments of MOHSD and Rospotrebnadzor welcomed the establishment of the Working Group and expressed general interest in participating in a future dialog on food and product safety, but asked for additional information on the working group's strategic goals and possible topics for discussion. MOHSD agreed to circulate Ref B points to other counterparts in the Russian government and promised a formal response by the end of September.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On August 23, EST officer met with Oleg Chestnov, deputy director of MOHSD's International Department and Marina Sheviriyova, deputy director of MOHSD's Department of Human Welfare and Consumer Protection. According to Chestnov, at least three groups within MOHSD would be involved in issues of the safety of food or goods: Sheviriyova's Department of Human Welfare and Consumer Protection, Rospotrebnadzor which handles food and most consumer goods, and the Federal Service for Supervision of Health Care and Social Development (Roszdravnadzor) which covers drugs and medical equipment. (NOTE: Russian exports to the United States in 2006 totalled \$19.8 billion, led by oil and other petroleum products, aluminum, metals and nuclear fuels. U.S. exports to Russia were primarily

machinery, meat -- mostly poultry, -- electrical equipment and high tech products. END NOTE)

14. (SBU) Citing asbestos as an example, Chestov noted that Russia and the United States may not use the same approaches or have the same standards for determining whether a food product or consumer good is safe and does not pose a threat to human health or the environment. Given the absence of uniform standards among different countries, Chestov said a dialog might provide a way to reach agreement in certain areas. In going forward and to avoid misunderstandings, he indicated that it would be critical to identify three areas: (1) agreed standards of health and safety; (2) areas of difference where discussion would be useful and we could work toward adopting a common approach, and (3) issues of fundamental disagreement where we are unlikely to make progress that should be left "to the future generation."

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Seeking to engage with Russian authorities on food safety is apt to be difficult. Embassy Moscow has been engaged in a food safety dialog with Russian counterparts in the federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Service (VPSS) and Rospotrebnadzor since those bodies were created in April 2004. Much of the discussion has revolved around Russia's overtly protectionist trade stance and restriction of trade through abuse of sanitary and phytosanitary standards that do not conform to international norms and the effect of that on Russia's bid to accede to the World Trade Organization. The Agriculture Office here sends and receives an average of a letter on the issue every working day. Digital video conferences between U.S. and Russian veterinary authorities are held regularly. In the past two months, two teams of Russian veterinary specialists have traveled to the United States to inspect poultry and pork slaughter, processing and cold storage facilities. Another team of nine Russian veterinarians is scheduled to inspect U.S. beef facilities in September.

16. (SBU) Two years ago, former Russian Deputy Minister of Agriculture Sergey Mitin told a visiting Codel that food imported from abroad posed the greatest threat of bioterrorism to Russia. His statement encapsulates the drumbeat of press releases issued by VPSS each time a shipment of food products is seized for alleged violation of Russian food safety rules. Likewise, Rospotrebnadzor has imposed bans on imports of Georgian and Moldovan wines and on Georgian mineral water purportedly out of concern for food safety and public health, although many observers believe those bans were actually politically motivated. Embassy has reported extensively on the context in which Russian import safety mechanisms (Refs C-H) among others operate which Washington agencies should find helpful. Additional reporting, including GAIN RS7046 and RS7326, can be found on Embassy Moscow's classified website under the rubric "Agriculture Reporting." END COMMENT.
Burns